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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Tilghman Literary Society,

OF THE

Western University of Pennsylvania,

ON THE 25th FEBRUARY, 1839.

THE EIGHTEENTH ANNIVERSARY.

BY SAMUEL W. BLACK, ESQ.

Lieut. Col. Penn. Regt.

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1839.

Pittsburgh, Feb. 27, 1839.

Sir,—In accordance with a resolution adopted by Tilghman Society, we the undersigned appointed a committee for that purpose, respectfully request, for publication, a copy of your address delivered before the Society, at the celebration of its Anniversary, on the evening of the 25th inst.

Allow us, Sir, to acknowledge the great pleasure we experienced on hearing an address, which, we believe, reflected, alike, honor on its author and the body which he represented.

JAMES B. SAWYER,
ROBERT A. BROWNE,
DAVID CARNAHAN,

SAMUEL W. BLACK, Esq.

Committee.

Pittsburgh, February 28, 1839.

Gentlemen—Your note of the 27th inst. on behalf of the "Tilghman Society," was received on the day of its date. In compliance with the request therein contained, I enclose you a copy of the address delivered at the celebration of our late anniversary. You will perceive I have not clothed this with "the customary suit" of apologies, for the simple reason, I do not believe they are ever made except when they are not needed. Please convey, to my fellow members, my thanks for their flattering kindness, with my best wishes for their lasting prosperity.

Very truly,

SAM. W. BLACK.

Messrs. James B. Sawyer, Robert A. Brown, D. Carnahan, Com.

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ADDRESS.



FELLOW MEMBERS,

A custom, justly honored in the observance, has this night drawn us together around the family altar of our society. To us her very existence is matter of gratification and pride, and the day that gave her birth, is properly set apart as one of rejoicing. Although in the drama of that day, we, my fellow members, were not actors, yet, with it and with those who played their parts in it, tradition has made us cotemporaries; for in the language of a learned American orator, “we *live* in the past, by a knowledge of its history.”—A remark, in this instance, most emphatically true—often have we heard the early history of this society—often have we been told the story of her many struggles, until, connecting our thoughts and sympathies with them, we have almost imagined ourselves partakers in them. We recall and commemorate with delight the birth-day of this society, and on the dawn of her existence we look back with pleasure, for on that day the purport of her creation was first declared, and on that day she received her name, and took her stand as a literary association. And we now rejoice, for the laudable intention

on that day set forth has not been perverted, and the high name with which she was then baptized has not been dishonored. The founders of this society were lovers of the human family, men actuated by a commendable desire of increasing their own store of knowledge, and of promoting, as far as in them lay, the diffusion of literature and healthy morals among their kind. These are remembrances that now rush upon us—are they not refreshing, and have *we* not a *right* to rejoice in them?

We feel that this *is* a festival, and yet for the occasion we employ no unnatural stimulants, for it has within itself an excitement, peculiar and indescribable, of which our veins acknowledge a thrilling fever, invigorating and healthy even in its rage. What cause or combination of causes might produce it, we are, perhaps, unable to determine; but this much we do know, whole rivers of rich and sparkling wine would fail in the effort. There is intoxication in it, yet the brain reels not neither does it lose its balance—there is a feeling of elevation without a consequent depression—there is lightness of heart with a religion in it—there is merriment mingled with respect. But why need I attempt to portray that which cannot be portrayed although it may be felt? It is precisely the kind of sensation an intellectual being should experience when he would thank God for the birth day of his country's independence, or as a rational creature rejoice with gratitude for favors given, by an effort to elevate the intellectual stature to the parallel of those who

dwell in the stars, rather than degrade the man to the base equality of brutes that perish.

Gentlemen, you and I have nearly the same number of years on our heads, and we are just entering, or have already entered, on that critical age, when, in the popular opinion of the day, alluring temptations from the path of duty win easy and numerous conquests. Whether humanity has in it more dust and less deity at one period of existence than another, is not for us now to enquire, and whether *young men* do not occasionally monopolize public solicitude to the exclusion and neglect of older sinners, is matter of speculation for more experienced heads. We are contented to believe that the hey-day of youth is the time of danger, at least it is the time we are taught, and correctly too, to guard most against vice, and to cultivate the fellowship of virtue.

Some person once said that "knowledge was virtue,"—it is a most beautiful idea and might be true if it comprehended enough to designate this ennobling and divine attribute. And if virtue were no more than the mere opposite of vice, knowledge alone might include it, for ignorance ever accompanied by a perversion of our passions, is the very soul, essence and existence of that we denominate vice. But "knowledge is power," and consequently the first step to virtue, seeing that it confers the ability to do the most good, and from this it is easy to reach the grand principle itself. To the question then, what is virtue? The heart and the judgment give a simultaneous and willing re-

sponse—it is the possession and propagation of true and wholesome knowledge, the reception and diffusion of that sweet and delightful light by which a dead man may live; for he *is* dead, who stalks the earth by creation “a little lower than the angels,” by education, by habit and growth in ignorance a little lower than a worm.

How beautiful then is knowledge! How lovely in company with its twin sister truth. Plato, heathen as he was, formed a proper estimate of their necessary affinity when declaring that “truth was the body of God,” he paused, and seeing something wanting to complete the perfection, added with a still nearer approach to the sublimity of inspiration—“*and light is his shadow.*” Virtue is a precious diadem, whose brightest jewels are charity, benevolence and mercy;—and the diffusion of knowledge comprehends them all. Who is more charitable than he who plucks tattered rags from a freezing mind, and wraps it in robes of warmth and beauty? Who more benevolent than he who does “the good Samaritan” with a famished and sickly intellect? And who more merciful than he who lifts the soul from a hell of ignorance, and sets it high on the throne of its own empire?

To this peerless and priceless crown the ambition of every man should look, and look with a desire to wear it for its own intrinsic value as well as its bright and glorious objects. To the attainment of this, probably no obstacle, presents so strong and broad a barrier as avarice—that “root of all evil, the love of money.” So

long as feeding and clothing the immortal intellect are weighed and rated by dirty dollars, so long will virtue droop and vice rear its ugly head. In national and individual instances the result is ever the same—where the contents of a flowing treasury are liberally bestowed on the promotion of general knowledge, prosperity will reign throughout the land. On that great field, the human mind, and on it alone, “the barren heaps of yellow dirt” will render a rich and luxuriant harvest. Individually and collectively, from the leprosy of avarice may this society be delivered.

The present, my fellow members, is hardly a proper occasion to attempt an enumeration of the many and various descriptions of mines we would find it necessary to explore in searching after this jewel knowledge. No such attempt will now be made. However there is a particular kind of study to which scarcely any one attaches the vast importance it most undoubtedly merits—a book *in* which the most unlettered may read, and *from* which the proprietor of classic lore may learn. It’s lines are drawn across the broad infinite of ether, and over the entire earth and boundless sea are spread it’s fertile pages; its leaves are hung on every tree. This, gentlemen, is the great volume of Nature;—is it possible to imagine any thing in which the ardor of youth, the reflection of full grown manhood, or the decline of faint old age could feel a livelier or more thrilling interest. Take the entire creation of God, the animate and inanimate essences of the world,

and a theme of study is found calculated for every temperament. Begin with the starry heavens, their contemplation will shed a calm and melancholy sweetness on the soul—turn in search of terror and excitement and the dark ocean presents itself, *“the glorious mirror where the Almighty’s form glasses itself in tempests.”* Follow observation among the creeping flowers, the green tops of the rolling forest, *“the babbling rivulets that rejoice with continuous laughter in their own being,”* the everlasting hills and the impregnable rocks—the broad breast bones of the mountains, and the heart fills with emotions

“We can ne’er express yet cannot all conceal.”

And in the contemplation of such a scene, there is more than the mere excitement, and delightful sensation of the hour; the consequent reflection is salutary and useful, for the mind will enquire, came these of themselves and by their own power? Are they the spontaneous creatures of chaos? Or does the perfection of their vast machinery show the master hand of Him *“who bringeth order out of confusion?”*

Turn we to the animate portion, it too, is full of interest, and the study of even its lower order commends itself to our serious attention. My fellow members, we may profit by imitating the brute creation; not indeed by degrading ourselves to their base level, but by learning from them to live according to the law of our nature; for they, creatures of appetite, unpossessed of soul and intellect, execute to the letter the only

law by which they are bound. Do not they in their place and condition, perform their duty and execute the will of him who made them? They most certainly do—and in so far, are not unworthy examples for man “the lord of them all.” By monsters of the deep and creatures of the earth, from “the great Leviathan” that sports upon the angry sea, to the grasshopper that sings itself to sleep beneath the curtain of a drooping leaf, the pages of nature are filled with eloquent and useful teachings.

By this study of nature we mean the natural observation of God’s works as they are spread before the eye, upon the earth, the sea and in the heavens, not as they are seen in the writings and descriptions of any man. And in such an observation, when the “*mind’s eye*” accompanies the natural, the feelings and reflections we have already mentioned will arise, although the observer may not be familiar with the science of the different objects. For nature, notwithstanding the foundation of all science, has not confined her wholesome influence to him exclusively who looks with scientific eye. On him who gazes with a proper spirit, the bright heavens will reflect beauty and good, albeit he has never heard of “*Arcturus and his sons;*” nay, more, *he* can read *there* who does not even know that the living stars are more than lighted lamps hung up to fret the darkness.

We profess to hold the cultivation of our minds in high estimation, yet we do not believe that this constitutes the entirety of educa-

tion; our feelings and passions as much demand our high attention. And in adverting to this subject we may be permitted to differ with the queer old woman's doctrine that "the human passions are to be suppressed and broken." A more erroneous and unnatural opinion never took possession of the human mind. By him who gave the soul its immortality every passion in the human breast was given. Think you, my fellow members, *he* made them that *we* might suppress them? Let any one, frightened at the strength of his own passions, make the attempt to smother them—if he succeeds, it must be by smothering the inborn spirit on which they live; for as well might he attempt the damming of Niagara's rapids while the bosom of Erie is swollen and heaving, as calculate on stopping the rushing current within, while the source of every passion is freighted and throbbing. And in such an effort the spirit must be broken else the temporary stoppage adding new strength to their wild violence will make them still more untameable and dangerous. Our passions are not to be suppressed, nor are they to suppress us, but they are to be educated and trained up and directed, that they may subserve the high purpose for which they were given. Let us then judge our passions by what they *will* be if educated and properly directed, rather than condemn them for what they *might* be, if prostituted and perverted. We should educate the powers of the heart as well as the mind, ever looking to some good eminence. Are we to shun ambition be-

cause the angels perverted it and fell by it? When in their error and their fate we have a lasting and useful lesson. Should we not rather cultivate and strengthen it though our extravagant hopes and wishes should carry us to dizzy heights "*beyond the flight of the Eagle.*" Should we refuse to cultivate a proper pride because some men have confounded it with vanity? For pride you will know has been rated as meaning the same thing with vanity, whereas they are no more alike than the 'Coriolanus' and 'the perfumed popinjay that pestered Hotspur.' While the one is an intellectual passion worthy of a man, the other is a peacock attribute sometimes worked into the form of humanity. Pride's empire is the soul, vanity dwells in the curl of the hair, the formation of the leg, or the fit of a boot. This feeling, my fellow members, should not be discarded because it is often misplaced and slandered, any more than honor should be held in abhorrence because it is sometimes *fa'isifid*.

With these remarks, founded on no particular subject, yet touching at knowledge as the opening door to virtue, I have detained you already sufficiently long. In pursuit of this knowledge, the study of nature was presented, and after it the necessity of educating and strengthening our innate passions as well and as much as the faculties of the mind.

Might we not before the close of these observations, again allude to those, who, eighteen years ago, laid the foundation stone of this society. Of these some have already risen to

high eminence among their fellow men, and some have passed beyond the reach of earthly honor. Here, in claiming the former as near kindred, we acknowledge exultation and pride, and in calling to remembrance each one of the latter, we inhale the fragrance of a good man's memory. To execute the fulness of our duty as members of this society we need but follow and emulate *their* virtues. If we do this, all party feelings of every kind, all jealousies and all bickerings would be forever excluded from the family circle; and the ambition to acquire knowledge, both for our own good and the good of others, would be "*the bright particular star*" of every member.

Let us then remember who we are and what we are, and the duty we owe to ourselves and to those who have gone before us; and the places and responsibilities we have to fill as members of "the Tilghman Society." And let us remember the duty we owe to this Institution, our "Alma Mater;" her reputation and honor are identified with her sons. And let us remember him also, who in this institution has been to all of us more than a father—the brightness of his intellectual eye is light enough for any darkness—long may it continue to beam and smile on the destinies of this University. And long may his portrait ornament this Hall, an evidence of the lasting respect and affection of those who were brought up under him.

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